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## DRAFT STATEMENT ON CREATIONISM

The National Academy of Sciences\* is compelled by duty to state again, as it did in 1971, that the teaching of creationism - the belief in special creation - is not appropriate in the science classes and textbooks of the nation's schools. Scientific and religious thought are two dominant but different aspects of human life. Each contributes separately, and often in mutually supportive ways, to human experience. The recently coined term "creation science" is used by those who are unable to reconcile these two great currents in human affairs. The term is contradictory and meaningless because it obscures the profound differences between the religious belief in special creation and the scientific explanations embodied in the theory of evolution.

Creationism begins with a literal belief in the biblical description of how the world and its creatures began. That is not science. Science begins with a question. To answer the question, verifiable facts are collected by observation and experimentation. New questions and theories about the way the world works grow out of the accumulated knowledge. Subsequently, newly acquired facts either substantiate the theories or require that they be altered or abandoned. Thus, a scientific theory is always an interim statement about the world. In time, as accumulating evidence consistently supports a theory, its truth becomes more and more likely. While creationist dogma requires faith and an end to inquiry, a scientific theory demands challenge and provides a guide to future research.

Two centuries of research on the part of biologists, geologists, physicists, astronomers, and chemists confirm the theory of evolution. The evidence shows that the earth is exceedingly old, that the history of living creatures spans billions of years, and that over the course of time there has been a constant evolution of the forms of life. While the mechanisms underlying evolutionary changes are not yet completely understood and continue to be an area of lively research, the fact that living things have evolved is firmly established. In time, the scientific approach should illuminate the remaining puzzles.

The National Academy of Sciences is deeply concerned with the education of the nation's youth. Science classes must train them to deal as responsible citizens with scientific knowledge and its relation to the political and social problems of a technological era. Science classes must also inspire some of our youth to become scientists themselves. There are many rewarding opportunities for scientifically trained individuals in research, education, and industry. Such employment will also promote innovation and the economic growth of our country. Modern medicine, agriculture, communications, and transportation are the fruits of science, not of creationist dogma. Neither responsible citizens nor future scientists are likely to emerge if confusion about the distinct natures of science and religion persists. For these reasons, creationism should not be included in science curricula.

\* Brief description of the Academy.

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